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Mrs J Jones
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Jones

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 13 March 2012 to look at work in mathematics.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of parts of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Pupils make good progress in each year group throughout the school. New initiatives implemented during the last two years have had a good impact on pupils' learning and progress. The proportion of pupils attaining the expected Level 4 has shown marked improvement, while the percentage reaching Level 5 has more than doubled over the same period. Attainment is now above average.
- Lesson observations and pupils' work show that they have a solid grasp of important mathematical concepts and skills and apply these well when solving problems and carrying out investigations, which they greatly enjoy.
- Achievement in mathematics now exceeds that in English: a small minority of pupils sometimes has difficulty in reading, interpreting and understanding written questions and instructions. This hinders

independent working. However, when adults explain the instructions, pupils demonstrate that they have the mathematical skills and knowledge to solve the problems.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is good.

- Lessons are well planned and tasks are matched carefully to the needs and abilities of different groups within each class. Teachers have high expectations of all pupils and ensure that learning proceeds at a brisk pace.
- Teachers provide many opportunities for pupils to solve an interesting variety of problems in real-life contexts using a good range of visual and practical resources to aid learning. Year 2 pupils, who were about to go on a class trip, divided the class into equal groups, worked out how many spare seats there would be on the bus and then calculated the costs.
- Open-ended questions are carefully phrased to promote good thinking skills and to assess pupils' understanding. Teachers often probe pupils' responses further to extend and deepen their thinking.
- Well-briefed teaching assistants support pupils well, especially those who may be finding it difficult to read and interpret problems.
- Adults are mostly quick to pick up misconceptions and often use these effectively as key teaching points for a group or the whole class. On occasion, when teachers and assistants focus on particular groups, pupils who are working independently 'slip through the net' and their misunderstandings are not noticed or dealt with quickly enough.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is good.

- The curriculum has been transformed over the last three years and now promotes effective conceptual development as well as teaching key mathematical knowledge and skills.
- A greatly increased emphasis on using and applying mathematical ideas through problem-solving and investigational approaches has accelerated progress and helped pupils to overcome a legacy of past underachievement.
- Effective use of computer programs engages and inspires pupils in lessons and when taking part in competitions against pupils from other schools around the world.
- Well-planned cross-curricular links are increasing pupils' enjoyment and enabling them to understand the importance of mathematics in a rich variety of situations. For example, Year 3 pupils used their measuring skills and understanding of the nets of solid shapes to create tombs for the Egyptian mummies they made as part of their 'Tomb Raiders' topic. Year 4 pupils' 'pyramid challenge' involved working out how many sandstone

blocks a builder would need to construct a pyramid with a five metre square base and then one twice the size. All of these activities provide valuable opportunities for independent and collaborative work and discussion.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is good.

- Strong and effective teamwork has sustained a good pace of development in mathematics during a period of staff turbulence and changes in the leadership of the subject. The new subject leader is being supported well as he develops his role.
- Improvement is driven by an extensive, ongoing programme of training for all staff, including modelling of good practice and sharing ideas.
- Accurate self-evaluation is based on rigorous analysis of individual pupils' progress. Regular pupil-progress meetings with individual teachers clearly identify pupils who are in danger of falling behind and additional support is provided to help them overcome difficulties.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving pupils' skills in reading and interpreting questions and problems to enable them to apply their mathematical knowledge and skills independently and with greater confidence
- ensuring that teachers constantly monitor the progress of all groups of pupils during lessons so that they pick up promptly on misunderstandings and enable all pupils to tackle independent tasks with accuracy and confidence.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics in the school.

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Carole Skinner
Additional Inspector